



The Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner explains how forensic autopsies are used to not only determine the cause of death, but also to support medical research and development.

An autopsy is an essential and respected tool for forensic pathologists. To determine the cause of death, there is simply no better way than to examine the body directly. The term "autopsy" comes from the Greek "see for yourself."

Before the autopsy, the forensic pathologist will begin with the patient's history. This usually includes talking to the family, the police, and obtaining medical records, emergency management documents, and police reports. The medical history and the circumstances of death are of particular importance. Morgue medical investigators, who act as the eyes and ears of the forensic pathologist, will summarize this information so that the examination of the corpse can address known problems and answer questions that might be expected. It is important to relate the results of the autopsy examination to the date, and especially to point out where they do not match. **For More Info :** [Acrobat Feed](#)

The forensic pathologist will begin the autopsy with a head-to-toe examination of the body "as is." This will include checking clothing if the decedent was wearing it and examining medical devices, if any. Where applicable, shooting and stabbing defects will be noted and trace evidence collected. After the body is cleansed, another thorough external examination is performed from head to toe looking for bruises, blemishes, and medical conditions. An x-ray of the body may precede the internal examination. A complete autopsy includes an internal examination of all organs and body cavities, including the head, neck, thorax, abdomen, and pelvis. Evisceration is performed in a manner that allows for burial viewing. Samples of body fluids and tissues are taken for toxicology, microscopy, and possibly other laboratory tests. Sometimes the brain, heart, or other organ mass or tissue is saved for careful study or counseling at a later date. Virtual autopsies, including CT or MRI scans, or molecular autopsies are often more adjuncts than alternatives to an internal examination.

Although very similar, hospital autopsies differ from forensic autopsies in that they are based on the consent of next of kin and are not legally authorized in the public interest. It does not contain the "evidence of injury" section, which is a hallmark of forensic autopsies.